

HISTORY - EPILOGUE: A SECOND CENTURY

The Akron Porcelain & Plastics Company enters its second century with no more guarantees than it had in 1890. The current environment is an uncertain time in which mergers, foreign competition, and e-commerce make the business world just as risky as it was when the Akron Smoking Pipe Company started.

The Akron Smoking Pipe Company began this odyssey with the idea of producing the finest clay pipes and built a business along the way that would allow the company to "corner" the clay pipe market by the early twentieth century. But even before the company could boast about making 83% of the nation's clay pipes, it delved into other product lines (the standard electrical porcelain field). As the twentieth century unfolded, this ability to anticipate new directions stood the company well, as in turn they turned to special (custom) electrical porcelain and later, plastics for electrical applications.

By the turn of the century, the Akron Smoking Pipe Company's directors had recognized that they needed to key their future not to local markets alone, but to the future of the country. Over the years the company's leadership saw the potential markets in the electrification of homes and businesses, electrical distribution, radio, telephone, appliances, automotive, the foundry industry, outdoor lighting, and mass transit applications. Several of these directions still dominate the bulk of the company's business in to the new millennium.

Although the present company has few local customers, its ties to the community remain strong through service to local organizations. Most of the company's employees come from the immediately surrounding neighborhoods, a relationship that provides good jobs for residents and a ready pool of dependable labor to the company. The relationship with the workers' union has been excellent, with only one significant strike in more than fifty years.

The Akron Porcelain & Plastics Company has survived for over a century for several reasons. First, the company's leadership over the years has been provided largely by one family. Since the time of F.W. Butler Sr.'s founding, three more men - F.W. Butler Jr, George H. Lewis Jr., and George H. "Mike" Lewis III, have continued the tradition of family ownership. Plans currently are in place to transfer ownership of the Company to a fifth generation. But it is not blood ties that kept the business going, it is the traditional values that each man passes down. These values, conservative fiscal policy (the pay-as-you-go attitude, incurring a few debts), the diversification of products manufactured (always with an eye to the future), the constant upgrading of facilities, good wages and fair treatment of employees, and the tradition of fine service to customers, have brought the company a continuity and purpose that allowed it to survive and prosper.

Consistency, foresight, service to the community and customer, and a quality work environment are the legacy of the Akron Porcelain & Plastics Company-a survivor of a 110 years of change-molding the future of a second century.